

# JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

## 2011 Executive Order 29 Recommendation #2

### Unclaimed Cremated Remains of Veterans

1. **OBJECTIVE:** Facilitate the honorable burial of the unclaimed cremated remains (cremains) of Virginia Veterans in a state veterans cemetery.
2. **BACKGROUND:**
  - The cremains of Veterans sometimes go unclaimed by family from funeral homes. When this happens, the cremains may sit on shelves in funeral homes for years or even decades.
  - The Code of Virginia allows funeral homes to dispose of unclaimed cremains after 90 days, but many funeral homes retain unclaimed cremains in storage for extended periods.
  - The Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) operates state veterans cemeteries in Amelia, Dublin, and Suffolk that provide honorable burials to qualified veterans.
  - If a set of unclaimed cremains can be positively identified as belonging to a veteran, and if that veteran is eligible for burial in a veterans cemetery, then DVS can provide that veteran with a dignified burial and an honorable final resting place among his/her comrades in arms.
  - While the Code of Virginia allows funeral homes to dispose of unclaimed cremains, it does not require the funeral homes to provide the names of the unclaimed cremains to DVS for determination of veterans status.
  - In an effort to encourage funeral homes to provide the names of unclaimed cremains, DVS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2009 with the Virginia Funeral Directors Association (VFDA) – one of the four funeral director associations in Virginia.
  - The other three funeral directors associations did not wish to sign an MOU with DVS.
  - Though the MOU with the VFDA has been in effect for two years, few names have been provided by funeral homes to DVS for determination of veterans status and eligibility.
  - DVS staff members have made a considerable effort to request the names of unclaimed cremains from funeral directors, but have met with limited success, as have the efforts of the non-profit Missing in America Project (MIAP) in Virginia.
3. **DISCUSSION:**
  - Veterans who served our Nation honorable deserve an honorable final resting place among their comrades in arms, not to end up unclaimed and forgotten on the back shelf of a closet in a funeral home.
  - If provided the names of unclaimed cremains, DVS can work with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to identify those belonging to Veterans, and can determine if they are eligible for burial in a state veterans cemetery.
  - The Code of Virginia gives funeral directors the authority to transfer the unclaimed cremains of Veterans to DVS for honorable burial.
4. **RECOMMENDATION:** That the Governor propose legislation requiring funeral homes to provide the names of unclaimed cremains to the Department of Veterans Services, in order to facilitate the honorable burial of unclaimed cremains of Virginia Veterans in a state veterans cemetery.